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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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Series A.

FROM : Amembassy GUATEMALA

SUBJECT: Monthly Guerrilla Report - May

REF : A-495 ARA DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR

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PORTIONS DENIED AS INDICATED

Summary

1. During the month of May, an upsurge of guerrilla-terrorist activity was noted, in contrast to the relatively quiet month of April. This appeared to be in accordance with plans of the Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes (FAR), the guerrilla-terrorist arm of the Partido Guatemalteco de Trabajo (PGT-the Communist Party), which had decided to take action against the GOG for the latter's failure to explain adequately the disappearance of some 28 Guatemalan communists (see last month's guerrilla report, A-495). Additionally, and significantly, reports began to be heard that the two extremist organizations, the FAR and a greatly weakened Movimiento Revolucionario del 13 de Noviembre (MR-13), were again possibly coming to terms, at the latter's initiative.

Terrorist Acts

2. On May 4, terrorists in Guatemala City undertook two bold acts which shocked Guatemalans and set the citizenry on nervous edge once again. For several weeks, quiet had prevailed, and the return to constitutionality was proceeding so well that a definite relaxation of the political atmosphere was discernible. However, on that day, FAR bands struck twice, the first time kidnapping the GOG Secretary of Information, Baltazar Morales de la Cruz (Embtel 837), and the second time, Romeo Augusto de Leon, President of the Guatemalan Supreme Court (Embtel 840). In capturing Morales, the FAR terrorists almost failed; attacking in mid-afternoon, the assailants killed Morales' chauffeur, when he apparently tried to flee the scene, and Morales' son (who had been in another car, saw the attack,

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more effective police work and hampering extremist activity. Additionally, the National Congress undertook an investigation of police methods and counter-terrorist activity, but not surprisingly, the investigation ended somewhat inconclusively, and the Congress claimed it was not the "proper organ" to investigate any kidnappings.

6. The state of siege was not quite as effective as hoped, however, for on May 26, after having given him warning, the FAR boldly kidnapped Hector Menendez de la Riva, Secretary General of the Partido Institucional Democratico (PID), as he drove home in the evening. It has been pointed out that as a result, the FAR had captive a representative of each of the branches of Government: Morales from the Executive, de Leon from the Judiciary, and Menendez from the legislative (where he holds the post of First Vice-President of the National Congress. He succeeded in escaping from the FAR on June 9).

Several Other Attacks

7. On May 5, local newspapers carried reports of an ambush of a military patrol in Guatemala City, during the early morning hours of that day. The report even claimed that an Army Lieutenant had been captured, but the GOG as well as the Army flatly denied any such occurrence. The incident was not mentioned again in the press and no further evidence has appeared that such an attack did take place.

8. Early in the morning of May 3, several bombs exploded around Guatemala City, but caused only minor material damage (Embtel 840). It is also possible that these were placed by far-rightists, particularly the MLN. On the night of May 2, headquarters of the Partido Institucional Democratico (PID) partially burned as a result of a sneak attack by unknown elements (again possibly the MLN), but fortunately the damage was not too great (Embtel 834).

9. Around 10 a.m. on May 13, a radio patrol car had a chance encounter with a car carrying several terrorists. When the policemen got out of their vehicle to arrest the occupants of the other vehicle, the latter opened fire, killing one and wounding two before fleeing on foot. There have been no clues about the identity of the terrorists, but it is presumed they were members of the FAR. It was even suggested that one of the terrorists may have been the FAR chief himself, Luis Turcios, but this was later proven to be false (Embtel 880).

10. There were also scattered reports of sabotage, mostly in the Zacapa-Izabal area. This consisted of the cutting of telegraph and telephone lines to isolated villages, and in one instance, the burning of a small railroad bridge.

11. Finally, there was some evidence of terrorist activity (distribution of propaganda, assassination of a comisionado militar, and the painting of FAR emblems on walls) in the Jalapa-Jutiapa area. One target was the finca Cerro Redondo, which has been a target in the past.

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Rural Terrorism

12. Guerrillas struck effectively in rural areas only once during the month, but that once [redacted] considerably angered the military [redacted] (Embtel 886). The attack occurred around kilometer 130 of the Atlantic highway near Sunzapote, during the early hours of the morning of May 17. A convoy of three army vehicles containing 14 men was ambushed, with the resultant death of 11 enlisted men and one officer, the wounding of two, the destruction of the vehicles, and the theft of the weapons of the group. The attack was carried out with machine guns, rifles, shotguns and grenades and one of the survivors claimed (probably erroneously) even a spotter plane was involved. Although the Army became very angry over the attack and vowed reprisal, it was also smarting under criticism over its methods, since a convoy (obviously should never travel in tight formation as this one apparently was doing when the attack occurred (some rumors even claimed that the convoy had stopped for coffee and was parked by the side of the road)).
13. The Army immediately and heavy-handedly proceeded to arrest some 125 local campesinos, although eventually most were released (the University Student Association protested their capture). It also sent out many patrols in an effort to locate the guerrillas, but not surprisingly, the latter had disappeared. It did succeed in recovering some of the stolen weapons, however.
14. More significantly, the Guatemalan Air Force mounted an operation on May 21 against a guerrilla encampment in the Cerro Azul area on the Guatemalan-Honduran border. While initial reports claimed that a helicopter was used to spot the guerrillas, and that it called in the Air Force's jets and fighter aircraft, which bombed, strafed and napalmed the area, later reports were somewhat conflicting. Again according to first reports, the GOG had discovered that guerrillas were using Cerro Azul as a training ground, and that as many as 300 persons were encamped there. The attack allegedly resulted in around forty dead guerrillas.
15. However, there are several confusing aspects to the story. First, the Honduras military supposedly participated in this effort, and yet there has been considerable conflicting information whether this was indeed the case. In any event, the Hondurans knew about the operation, even if they did not actually participate extensively. Secondly, [redacted] the Guatemalan Army as far as can be ascertained has never sent any troops up Cerro Azul to verify the strike, to confirm any deaths, or otherwise investigate the results of the strike. Consequently, any reports of dead guerrillas are highly unreliable and in fact there is no confirmation whether there even were any guerrillas in the area. The GOG has never issued any bulletin on the strike, and has not clarified any of the above questions. It is true that an air strike did indeed take place, but its results were perhaps less than hoped for. The only press notice given to the strike was an oblique reference in one Guatemalan paper to Army activity against guerrillas, and a news story which appeared in the

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Honduran press (Honduras cable 537 to Dept). However, Guatemalans have also been quick to point out that Cerro Azul lies mostly in Honduras and that the Hondurans should do the investigating, which apparently they have not done either.

FAR-MR-13 Rapprochement?

16.

Undoubtedly, the MR-13 is suffering from poor morale at the moment, and has lost the elan of its earlier days to the FAR. Superior organization, larger resources, and support from Cuba all combine to make the FAR the primary extremist group in Guatemala at the moment, and if the MR-13 wishes to continue doing battle, it undoubtedly realizes it will have to come to some sort of agreement with the FAR. If it does so on the latter's terms, as it appears to be doing, there is a good possibility that peace between the factions may occur, thereby strengthening to some degree the over-all extremist movement in Guatemala.

17. COMMENT: Despite the considerably increased extremist activity, it is to the GOG's credit that it has consistently maintained a relatively calm position, reiterating after each attack that the extremists are anxious to disrupt the constitutional process, but that the GOG will do all in its power to assure a tranquil transfer of power to the new Government on July 1.

18. While the GOG is undoubtedly correct in its analysis of the rationale for the extremist activity, there is also probably some truth in the FAR's statements: it has made clear that it also is trying to determine the fate of some 28 communists who were allegedly being held in Government jails. Although it failed to obtain an adequate answer, it did succeed in embarrassing the GOG on this point, and in raising considerable support on humanitarian grounds from impeccable circles for the captured communists.

19. FAR has also made obvious that free elections and a constitutional process are of little importance to it, and that Mendez' assumption of office will not bring peace and tranquility from the FAR. PR leaders themselves talk of up to six months to bring the guerrillas under control but these private views and personal evasive actions to avoid FAR acts suggest greater pessimism. Both the PGT and FAR are still following the line agreed upon at the PGT February 1966 National Conference: (A line which was backed at the Tri-Continental Conference in Habana, January 1966.) that violent revolution is the only acceptable line. Although some party leaders disagree with this line of violent revolution now--any major changes will have to be made at the Fourth National Congress of the PGT which is scheduled for "sometime before the end of 1966."

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